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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, EUR/ERA, IO

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TAGS: PREL PGOV OSCE CY RU

SUBJECT: CYPRIOTS SUPPORT DISCUSSION OF RUSSIAN SECURITY

PROPOSAL, UNAWARE OF CONTENT

REF: A. COHEN-FITZPATRICK EMAIL OF 11/25/2008

¶B. MOSCOW 3437

Classified By: Ambassador Frank C. Urbancic, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The head of RoC President Demetris Christofias's diplomatic office, Leonidas Pantelides, met the DCM on November 25 to brief on Christofias's November 19-20 trip to Moscow. Pantelides had accompanied Christofias and was privy to discussions on Russia's European security proposal. The Russians had welcomed Cyprus's support, he said, but considered Nicosia an inappropriate interlocutor on the details of this initiative, and provided no specifics on its content or on plans for moving it forward. Pantelides ventured that Medvedev would seek a broad trans-Atlantic audience to deliberate his plan, and thus use the OSCE as a venue for formal discussion. Turning to Russia's relations with the West in general, Pantelides, a former RoC ambassador in Moscow, suggested the new Obama administration take a page from French President Sarkozy's book and engage Russia. "The Russians are big and clumsy but not ambitious or aggressive -- you can talk to them." Pantelides himself EzQFQo-Q``ever, about Christofias's anti-NATO statements made during the trip. END SUMMARY.

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Rolling Back the Years?

¶12. (SBU) Christofias's trip to Moscow (Ref B) dominated Greek Cypriot media in late November. Most coverage tilted positively, focusing on a half-dozen technical MOUs the countries signed and on the Joint Political Declaration, in which Russia accepted as its own nearly every Greek Cypriot position on the Cyprus Problem. Pundits raised eyebrows and critics croaked, however, over the Cypriot president's November 19 comments welcoming Russia's initiative to update the international security architecture in Europe. "I am confident that European partners will in the long run share the opinion of Cyprus," Christofias later declared. Upon receiving an honorary doctorate from a Moscow university the following day, the RoC leader turned his sights on NATO, voicing pride that Cyprus was one of a handful of EU member states not party to the Alliance, with Cypriot headlines reading "No Links to NATO While I'm Around." Government Spokesman Stephanos Stephanou on November 24 questioned why NATO remained in existence, after the Warsaw Pact's dissolution, and suggesting that NATO had taken on unpalatable roles since. "Should I remind you of Yugoslavia, Iraq, or Afghanistan?" Stephanou asked.

¶13. (C) Post since has engaged numerous interlocutors to determine whether Christofias and Stephanou's anti-West diatribes were fleeting products of being swept up by the moment in Moscow, vestiges of their Communist Party roots, or deliberate and indicative of an "eastward" policy shift. Their commentary followed a string of unhelpful Cypriot foreign policy moves, from green-lighting a Cypriot embassy in Havana and a Venezuelan mission in Nicosia to strongly criticizing the alleged U.S. raid in eastern Syria in October.

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They Love Us Because We're Small

¶14. (C) A well-respected Cypriot diplomat reasonably friendly to the Embassy, Leonidas Pantelides enjoys a reputation of defending wholeheartedly the actions of the countries where he has served. In his November 25 meeting with the DCM, he empathized throughout with Russia's specialness, paranoia, and need to be understood. Prompted by the DCM, he expounded

on Christofias's Moscow visit, "On the new security architecture, we welcomed the idea and asked for the discussion," he began. But Medvedev did not offer Christofias any details on the plan. "We're not a threat to them, so they're candid with us. But Russia doesn't consider Cyprus a serious interlocutor on political-military themes," he explained, and so had shared no detail, nor had the Cypriots requested any before publicly voicing their support.

15. (C) While President Christofias had publicly endorsed the architecture proposal and called on other EU countries to do the same, Cyprus had not committed to promote it in specific fora. Pantelides thought Medvedev would aim for a broad audience. "The circle of interlocutors must be Euro-Atlantic," he ventured. Nicolas Sarkozy had called for deliberations at the OSCE when Medvedev first floated the

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proposal, and the Russian president likely would cite French support in seeking a hearing there.

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More a Teddy than an Angry Bear  
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16. (C) The new U.S. administration would be well served by emulating Sarkozy in his dealings with Russia, Pantelides thought. "He doesn't try to isolate them. He engaged them and won their trust." In so doing, the French president might have prevented the Russians and/or their Ossetian proxies from taking Tbilisi, Pantelides continued, ensuring that last August's conflict did not spread further. His four years in Moscow had shown him the Russians don't want to be feared, but respected. Now, however, they once again felt surrounded and under attack, if not physically then ideologically. "But they do listen," he assured.

17. (C) In seeking this new security architecture, Moscow hoped to restore the balance of power that existed before the 1990s, Pantelides said. There were plenty of reasons for the U.S. and NATO to seek a cooperative arrangement with Medvedev, he argued, from countering arms proliferation to winning the fight in Afghanistan. Moscow had welcomed news of President-elect Barack Obama's victory in November, and was optimistic that U.S.-Russia relations could be put on a better course.

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Saw No Evil, Heard No Evil  
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18. (C) Why, then, had Christofias bashed NATO from Moscow, with his spokesman echoing the inflammatory points at home? the DCM questioned. Their remarks dismissed not only NATO's relevance as a force for peace and security, countering 21st century threats, and helping to build security in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Balkans, but also ignored existing cooperative efforts with Moscow such as the NATO-Russia Council. Not even Medvedev and Putin were taking as strong a line against the Alliance, he added. Pantelides refused to engage. "I'm afraid I cannot comment on this, as I was out of the country and didn't hear those comments," he unconvincingly replied.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Christofias had two primary objectives for his visit to Moscow. One was economic: to win Cyprus's removal from Russia's "black list" of countries not fully cooperating with GOR tax officials. The other was to ensure Russia would continue to watch the RoC's back regarding Cyprus Problem developments, especially in the Security Council where Turkey will sit as a non-permanent member beginning in January. Once Christofias had secured Medvedev's signature on the Joint Political Declaration, he'd likely have agreed to renaming Nicosia "St. Petersburg" -- or perhaps "Leningrad," given his political beliefs. All Embassy contacts canvassed have agreed there is little substance (and even less understanding) behind Cyprus's support of the Medvedev European security plan. Further, Cyprus's use as a Russian Trojan Horse in organizations like the European Union lies mainly in its ability to block consensus, not to promote initiatives like this one. While Cyprus conceivably could prevent adoption of an EU common position regarding the new security architecture, local EU member-state representatives claim it won't have to -- member states already are deeply divided.  
Urbancic